



Greater Bordentown Area
Bicentennial Celebration Committee



BOX 1976

Bordentown, New Jersey 08505

"Festival U.S.A. September 19 - 26, 1976"

CURATOR
Hall of Fame
New York University
New York, N.Y.

Dear Sir,

The entrance of Clara Barton into the Hall of Fame is an important milestone in her life. Since Miss Barton was intimately associated with history of this town this event takes on added interests locally.

May we have a copy of any materials that have been prepared by the University commemorating this occurrence? The materials will be on permanent display at the Clara Barton Schoolhouse.

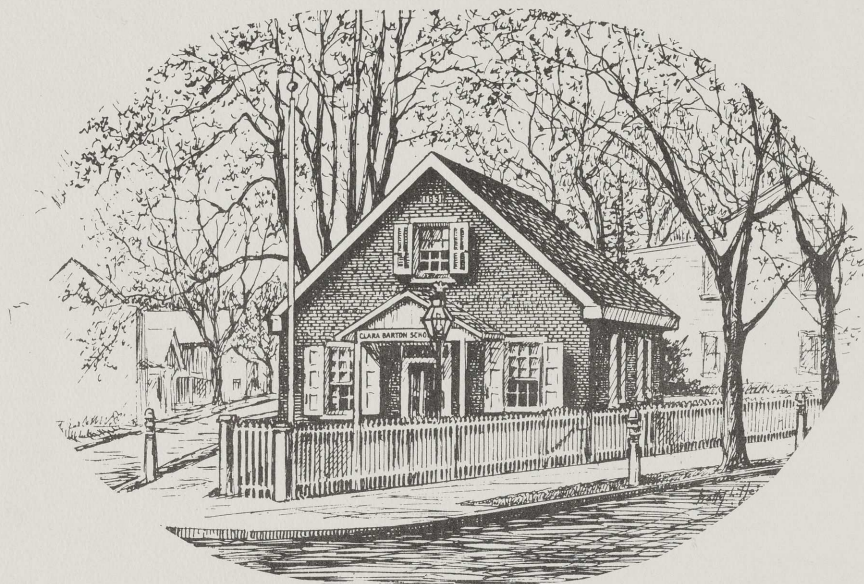
Sincerely,

John E. Callery
John E. Callery, Pres.

Enc/

Clara Barton School

BORDENTOWN, NEW JERSEY



A NEW JERSEY LANDMARK



Prepared by

**Bordentown Area
Bicentennial Committee**

EARLY EDUCATION IN NEW JERSEY

Although the first laws concerning Education were passed by the Colony of New Jersey in 1693 and 1695, it was nearly two hundred years before a system of public education, supported by taxation, became a reality. Colonial New Jersey, developed a "parochial school" attitude and the various religious denominations educated their children according to their own methods. In 1831 and 1838, other laws made it possible for this group, when education was required as part of their discipline, to receive state financial support. In other schools each student was assessed a sum sufficient to meet the schools expenses. Even though this sum was small it prohibited many children from attending school. A completely free education was available for the poor, but getting oneself classified as a "pauper" was considered humiliating.

The Public School concept was gaining support in the colonies of New England and New York and had met with some success. Thus, Clara Barton, born in Massachusetts, educated and a teacher in New York, came to Bordentown, with this concept firmly in mind.

CLARA BARTON (1821-1912)

While a student at Clinton Institute, Oneida County, New York, Clara Barton became acquainted with Mary Norton, of Hightstown, N. J. She accepted an invitation to visit Mary's home in October, 1851. A few months later she commenced teaching in a "pauper school" in Hightstown and was repulsed by the idea. On the advice of Mary's father, Clara visited Bordentown and talked with Mr. Peter Suydan, the local postmaster and chairman of the school committee.

In Miss Barton's own words: "From him I gained confirmation of the fact, that New Jersey, had made legislative provisions for the introduction of public schools, but owing to the strong opposition of public sentiment it had not proceeded to make the law obligatory. That the schools were generally, if not completely, taught by ladies, more frequently in their own homes, as a means of eking out a slender living, widows and people who 'had seen better days,' often elegant persons but with no fitness for the position, and no ability for instruction beyond their own limited knowledge gained years before in some similar manner; when this limit was reached, and the pupil became aware of it, he became an 'undesirable citizen,' and was graduated into the street.""

Trenton, Burlington and Newark had made attempts at public schools with more or less success but all other towns and boroughs remained unchanged. In 1852, Bordentown reported that not one of its seven schools

met in a building owned by the township. In 1850, an effort had been made in the direction of a public school. A dilapidated brick building, that had been moved in 1839 from its original location on West Street near where the Methodist Church is now located, to the corner of Crosswicks and Burlington Streets, was fitted out and a man engaged to teach. The effort failed and the building was again closed in "disgrace and discouragement." The old building had been used as a school by the Quakers and others from 1797.

After speaking with many of the large number of boys that seemed to be loitering around the streets, Miss Barton returned to Mr. Suydan, and made known her desire to open a public school in Bordentown. Brushing aside his objections, Miss Barton stated, "My only desire is to open and teach in Bordentown, a school to which the outcast children can go and be taught; and I would emphasize the desire by adding that I wished no salary." She did, however, insist that the school should be a free public school supported as provided by the laws of New Jersey and not one more "private" school.

A meeting of the full Board decided that the "Old Schoolhouse" be refitted and a school commenced. About five weeks later notices were given to the Register and posted in printed notices about the town that: "A Public School, taught by Miss Clara Barton, in the brick schoolhouse, corner of Crosswicks Street, would commence on Monday next at 9 o'clock, etc;" signed by the Committee.

It was late in May, 1852, when Clara Barton armed with an armload of books, approached the old, firmly closed building to be met by six boys, ranging in age from ten to fourteen and a little brother of six.

By twelve o'clock the old building was spick and span. A blackboard on each of two sidewalls, three maps, and the books that Clara had brought constituted the schools only equipment. In the afternoon, using the maps, the small group visited the far places of the world and learned of the people, climate, crops, animals and general living conditions. By next morning the class had doubled, after the lunch break there were twenty and at the end of the week, forty. In the second week the school population reached fifty-five pupils squeezed inside the 18' x 23' building and twice that number outside. All were boys, because as yet, no girl would risk the stigma of attending a "pauper school." In the third week six girls appeared and were accepted.

The overcrowding forced the Committee to consider a second school and Miss Barton sent to New England for a friend, Miss Frances Childs. A week later the second school was opened in a rather roughly finished-off room over a tailor shop. Mr. Suydan's daughter, Jenny, aged eighteen, served as a teacher's aide. Still cramped for space, the Committee raised \$4,000 for a new school, that was built and opened late in the winter. Six hundred pupils

were ready to be classified and divided into classes for the staff that had now reached eight. Early in 1853, Clara's voice failed, no doubt aggravated by the dampness, lime dust and overwork connected with the new building, and she was forced to take time off. Supported by the prejudice of that period, a man had been appointed principal of the new school and Clara never returned. She went on to even greater achievements as the founder of the American Red Cross. The Bordentown area owes a great deal to Miss Barton; for when Laws were enacted in 1867, 1871 and 1874; making the Free Public School manditory and attendance compulsory; it had in operation a successful system of Education.

In 1920 the State Commission of Education, hearing that the old school was to be sold at auction, authorized its purchase for three hundred dollars. The building was restored as nearly as possible to its original condition, with funds contributed by school children and teachers of the State. The restored building was dedicated on July 11, 1921, as a memorial to Clara Barton.

The building is maintained by the Bordentown City Board of Education and individuals or groups desiring to visit this educational landmark may contact the School (298-0676) or the Bordentown Historical Society (286-1740). (Information abstracted from "Bordentown 1682-1976," soon to be released.)

CHRONOLOGY

- 1682 Area settled.
- 1762 Ad for teacher appeared.
- 1778 Burgess Allison Academy founded.
- 1842 Middleton School for blacks opened.
- 1851 Bordentown Female College started.
- 1852 Clara Barton arrived.
- 1853 Elementary School #1 erected.
First Catholic School meets.
- 1874 Compulsory Education Law passed.
- 1895 City and Township School Districts separated.
- 1898 Addition made to School #1.
- 1905 Township closed one room school.
- 1907 High School approved by State.
- 1908 Second addition to School #1.
- 1915 Kinder-Garten Building purchased.
- 1925 MacFarland School occupied.
- 1936 Six room added to MacFarland School
- 1942 MacFarland School destroyed by fire.
- 1949 #2 School for blacks closed.
- 1953 Township opens Peter Muschal School.
- 1956 New Clara Barton School replaces School #1.
- 1965 Bordentown Regional High School dedicated.